

MC EWEN HOUSE
4106 Gallatin Street
Hyattsville
Prince Georges County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-978

HABS
MD
17-HYATV,
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

McEWEN HOUSE

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17-HYATV,
5-

Location: 4106 Gallatin Street, Hyattsville, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: George R. Armstrong and Margaret Spurlin (also present occupants)

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: The McEwen House is both a fine example of a Queen Anne-style suburban residence, and an identified example of pattern-book architecture. The plans were produced by R.W. Shoppell's nationally-known Cooperative Building Plan Association of New York. The house is representative of the architecture produced during the nationwide boom in suburban development that occurred during the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1887. An account of its construction appeared in the *Washington Evening Star*, November 3, 1887, as follows: "C.H. McEwen, during the past season, has completed one of the finest houses in the place, and has settled down here as a permanent resident."

2. Architect: The house was designed by architects of R.W. Shoppell's Cooperative Building Plan Association of 63 Broadway, New York. It appeared in *Modern Houses* as part of their mail order catalog of building plans, in 1887.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

1882 Deed JWB 1:244, 12 September 1882
Joseph B. Bryan et ux
To
George J. Johnson and Louis D. Wine
196 acres on the west side of the Baltimore Washington turnpike, immediately south of Ellaville and north of Hyattsville.

- 1887 Deed JWB 8:73, 16 February 1887
George J. Johnson and Louis D. Wine, of
Washington, D.C.
To
Robert B. Donaldson
Lots 29 & 30 as in plat JWB 1:286
- 1887 Deed JWB 8:74, 16 February 1887
Robert B. Donaldson
To
Clarence H. McEwen
Lots 29 & 30
- 1890 Deed JWB 14:314, 5 March 1890
Frederick J. Brown, atty. authorized to sell
by Mortgage JWB 10:171 from Clarence McEwen
To
Benjamin Charlton, highest bidder
Lots 29 & 30
- 1890 Deed JWB 14:316, 10 March 1890
Benjamin Charlton
To
John M. Gregory
Lots 29 & 30
- 1892 Deed JWB 20:378, 11 January 1892
John M. Gregory et ux
To
Ida M. Gregory
Lots 29 & 30
- 1894 Deed JWB 30:537, 23 July 1894
Ida W. and William B. Stokes
To
Emily A. Bailey
Lots 29 & 30
- 1895 Deed JWB 32:673, 2 November 1895
Emily A. and Harry O. Bailey
To
Charles H. Dickson
Lots 29 & 30
- 1895 Deed JWB 35:551, 16 November 1895
Charles H. Dickson
To
Harry O. Bailey
Lots 29 & 30

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- 1900 Deed JB 11:466, 29 June 1900
Marion Duckett & E. Dent, trustees by decree
of Equity #2305, lands of Harry O. Bailey
To
Allen Curran, highest bidder
Lots 29 & 30
- 1904 Deed 22:8, 15 October 1904
H.I. Keyser et ux, by virtue of Mortgage JB
11:467 from Allen Curran
To
Mary E. Galt
Lots 29 & 30
- 1923 Deed 206:156, 15 September 1923
Mildred Galt Geib and Robert Geib et al
To
Andrew J. and Mary S. Newman
Lots 29 & 30, of which Mary E. Galt died
possessed, and devised to Mildred, Dwight,
Dorothy and Frank Galt
- 1928 Deed 302:55, 21 March 1928
Andrew J. Newman et ux
To
Edward A. Roche
Lots 29 & 30
- 1941 Deed 622:75, 4 August 1941
M. Francis Roche et ux
To
Rose A. Roche, widow of Edward A. Roche
Lots 29 & 30
- 1945 Deed 787:61, 7 June 1945
Rose A. Roche, widow
To
Amelia A. Lynham
Lots 29 & 30
- 1949 Deed 1163:247, 2 September 1949
Amelia A. Lynham, widow
To
E. Clare Turner
Lots 29 & 30
- 1949 Deed 1163:249, 2 September 1949
E. Clare Turner
To
Amelia and Lucy Lynham

Lots 29 & 30

1972 Deed 4108:267, 4 August 1972
 Lucy A. Lynham, surviving joint tenant of
 Amelia Lynham
 To
 Nicholas and Barbara Kovalakides
 Lots 29 & 30

19?? Deed 5399:436
 Nicholas and Barbara Kovalakides
 To
 George R. Armstrong and Margaret Spurlin

4. Builders, suppliers: The house was built for Clarence McEwen from plans and specifications supplied by mail order, designed by the architects of The Cooperative Building Plan Association, 63 Broadway, New York. The actual construction contractor is not known.

5. Original plans and construction: The plans were provided by the Cooperative Building Plan Association, Residence Design No. 444. The actual drawings that Mr. McEwen received in order to build his house are gone, but the plans for this model can be found in the company's *Shoppell's Modern Houses*. In addition to working plans and elevations (at 1/4" scale), and larger-scale details, the client would receive specifications describing and giving quantities of materials, a color sheet showing color selections and instructions for painting, a supplemental sheet with information regarding cisterns, privies and indoor plumbing, and blank contracts ready for use (Pearl, pg. 5).

6. Alterations: The current house differs from the original plans in that the walls separating the entry/stair hall from the parlor have been removed, and there is no fireplace in the hall, nor doorway into the dining room. The doors from this entry have been moved upstairs.

B. Historical Context:

In 1835 one of the first railroad lines in the country, the Washington Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, was built from Baltimore to Washington, running through Prince George's County. By providing the means of transportation for commuters, the B&O line became a corridor for development during the late-19th century. The suburban development of areas such as Hyattsville was

part of a national trend. In addition to real estate speculation, the rise of the federal government which provided jobs in the capital city helped create the demand for new housing. Thus, suburban developments sprang up along lines of transportation, both railroad and, later, trolley lines.

The suburban community of Hyattsville was developed by Christopher C. Hyatt, who first purchased the property mid-century. Prior to the suburban development, a small crossroads community formed. By 1859, Hyatt had been named postmaster of this new community which was then given his name. In 1873 Hyatt had a section surveyed and platted into lots roughly 60' x 280', calling it "Hyatt's Addition to Hyattsville." Hyatt's was the first suburban development in Prince George's County. By 1878 it had evidently met with great success, having grown into a desirable community, as it was described in Hopkins Atlas (pg. 9) of that year:

Hyattsville, on the Washington Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, is a beautiful village, tasteful houses in the Modern style of architecture, ornamented with gardens and lawns, is largely indebted, for its prosperity, to Christopher C. Hyatt,... it has gradually increased in beauty and prosperity until it stands as one of the foremost villages between Baltimore and Washington.

Other railroad suburbs would later follow, such as Riverdale, platted in 1887, and Berwyn and Berwyn Heights in the 1890s.

Capitalizing on Hyatt's success, George Johnson and Louis Wine purchased 196 acres adjoining the original section of Hyattsville in 1882 and platted the development known as "Wine and Johnson's First Addition to Hyattsville." Approximately 100 building lots, measuring roughly 50' x 150', were created. The subdivision included two parklands. This is the area where Clarence McEwen purchased a lot in 1887 and completed a home the same year. According to an account in the *Washington Evening Star*, "C.H. McEwen, during the past season, has completed one of the finest houses in the place, and has settled down here as a permanent resident" (3 November 1887). Mr. McEwen served as one the town commissioners for Hyattsville in 1888.

The McEwen House plans were taken from a pattern book entitled *Shoppell's Modern Houses*. The designs were produced by R.W. Shoppell's, Cooperative Building Plan Association of New York. This particular model is Residence Design No. 444. The catalog gives an artist's rendering, floor plans, and a complete description including dimensions, interior and exterior finish, special accommodations, suggested colors, etc. Mail-order and pattern-book-designed homes, a popular means of obtaining a home during this period, are largely a result of suburbanization. The rise of suburban development aimed at middle- and moderate-income families was in full swing during the 1880s and 1890s. This new growth created both the need for a new house type--something between a town house and a country house--and a way to provide house designs cheaply and in volume. Thus, mail-order plans and/or houses became one of the primary means for designing and building suburban housing.

George and Charles Palliser are credited as the first "mail-order architects," providing a much-needed service for moderate-income would-be homeowners who could not afford an architect's fee. The Pallisers published their first booklet, *Model Homes for the People, A Complete Guide to the Proper and Economical Erection of Buildings*, in 1876. It was so popular that two years later they published *Palliser's American Cottage Home*. Robert W. Shoppell was one of the more successful to follow the Pallisers' lead. He began producing mail-order house designs in the early 1880s. He expanded to a staff of fifty architects, claiming to eliminate time-consuming correspondence by keeping a large staff on hand ready to prepare any conceivable variation on their standard plans. By the 1890s they had produced thousands of designs under the name of Cooperative Building Plan Association. The designs reflect the popular architectural trends of Victorian America with projecting bays and towers, wrap-around porches, cross-gable roofs, polychromatic wall treatment, asymmetrical plans, and ornamental jig-sawn trim. Volume enabled Shoppell to offer high-style designs at middle-class prices. Shoppell's mail-order plans included every necessary specification from detailed drawings to instructions for painting and blank builders contracts.

Clarence McEwen had his house only a few short years before he defaulted on the mortgage and the house was sold by trustee. The advertisement for its sale described the improvements to the property as follows: "handsome two-story and attic frame dwelling....with

eight rooms besides attic, and cellar laid in concrete. The house is heated by a furnace supplied with gas and has large porches. There are also on the premises a large chicken house and a pump house. The property is only a five minute walk from the (B&O Railroad) Station" (Equity #1798). It passed through a couple of owners and was again offered at equity sale in June of 1900. It was described at this time as "improvements are all of the first class... one of the best buildings in Hyattsville" (Equity #2305). It was owned by the Galt family for nearly twenty years from 1904 until 1923. Two widowed sisters-in-law shared it for many years also, from 1945 until 1972.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The McEwen House is a fine example of a middle-class suburban residence in the Queen Anne style. It features the variety of materials and surfaces typical of the style with its clapboards, shingles and half-timber framing. It also has the irregular massing and floor plan, cross-gable roof, turned-post porch, brackets and cut-away windows, etc. that distinguish this Victorian-era style.

The McEwen House was typical of the suburban residences of the era. A new concept, the suburban house combined the best of city and country--with a larger lot than urban rowhouses, and with a chicken house and probably a garden, as in the country. It sat detached on its own lot, yet it was oriented towards the street and other houses along the street. Another feature of the suburban house demonstrated here is the modernization as seen in the central heat, indoor bathroom and concrete basement that were original to the house.

2. Condition of fabric: The house appears to be in very good condition, maintaining most of its original architectural features.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: It has a two-and-a-half-story, irregularly shaped main block with a two-story rear kitchen ell. It is four bays across with a gable-front roof. There are porches at each elevation.

2. Foundation: The foundation is of brick, with a full, concrete basement.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are a mixture of wood materials including clapboard siding on the first story, scalloped shingles on the second, half-timber framing in the third or half story, and scalloped shingles in the front gable end.

4. Structural system, framing: The house is of wood, presumably balloon, framing.

5. Porches: A large porch supported by turned posts (without balustrade) runs the length of the south front facade and wraps around the west side. The west-side porch follows the contours of the house, extending where the house extends. A porch to the rear of the east side has been largely enclosed.

6. Chimneys: There is a large interior brick chimney to the center of the house.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front entry is the second bay from the west. There is a transom over the doorway which, like the windows, has a border of smaller stained-glass lights (purple, blue and yellow). It has a plain wooden surround. The door has a large light in the top, again with a border of smaller stained-glass lights. There is also an exterior doorway from the kitchen on the west side, and at the east side, to the rear of the enclosed porch extension of the current dining room (library on plan).

b. Windows: The typical window is a one-over-one-light-sash, the top sash having a border of small stained-glass panes. The windows to the front of the first story run from floor-to-ceiling. There is a two-and-a-half-story octagonal bay to the west side with cut-away bays at either corner, flanked by brackets with a pendant between. In the gable end of this bay are a pair of smaller, eight-over-eight-light-sash windows. The dormer on the east side has a triple set of fifteen-light-casement windows. The windows have a plain wooden surround, painted in a contrasting color.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The house has a gable-front roof on the main block, with a cross gable on the west side octagonal bay, and a lower gable roof on the kitchen ell. It is covered with composition shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves overhang, supported by exposed rafters at the sides. The gable front has an ornamental bracket to each side at the end of the roofline.

c. Dormers: There is a large, jerkinhead-roofed dormer at the east side. It is supported by large brackets at either side, and has a triple, fifteen-light-casement window.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The first floor has a slightly irregular floor plan which was originally three rooms with a large stair hall, and a rear kitchen ell (the walls of the separate stair hall have been removed). Entry is directly into a large parlor, with the stairway along the west wall. The room is lit by floor-length windows along the front. There is a fireplace at the north wall, to the east of which is a large doorway--with pocket doors--into the dining room (library on plan). The dining room to the northeast opens into an enclosed porch at the east side. There is a fireplace in the southwest corner, and at the west wall is another large doorway--with pocket doors--into the den (dining room on plan). This room opens into the kitchen ell to the north. In the southeast corner of the kitchen is a back stairway.

b. Second floor: The second floor follows the same basic pattern as the first with three (bed)rooms and a stairhall extending through the center.

c. Third floor: The third or half story is finished with bedrooms.

2. Stairways: The house has a front or main stairway, and a back stairway from the kitchen. The main stair is a decorative, open-string, open-well, three-run stair.

It begins along the south front wall, up a few steps to a landing in the southwest corner of the room. It then turns 90 degrees and continues along the west wall to a second landing. Again the stair turns 90 degrees and continues to the second floor. It has an ornate newel post which consists of a heavy pedestal with fluted columns cut into the corners, on top of which are four Corinthian columns supporting a tiered, pyramidal top with an acorn final. There is a chippendale-pattern balustrade, with partially turned balusters. There is no ornament in the step ends, but the walls are spandrelled. There is also a closed, back stairway in the kitchen ell.

3. Flooring: There are dark-stained hardwood floors throughout. The flooring in the first-floor stairhall has alternating boards of light and dark wood, and runs north-south rather than east-west, as it does in the other rooms.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster without any ornamentation, with the exception of a narrow strip of crown molding along the ceiling in the parlor and stairhall. There is a plaster medallion with a floral pattern surrounded with concentric circles in the dining room.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways have symmetrically molded trim with bull's-eye corner blocks. There are double-door doorways with panelled, pocket doors between the parlor and dining room, and the dining room and den.

b. Windows: The windows have the same surrounds as the doorways.

6. Decorative features and trim: There is ornamental glazed tile around the fireplace.

7. Hardware: The pocket doors have decorative cast key plates and other hardware. The front door has a cast plate around the door knob, and has working transom hardware.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: According to an early description of the house, it was heated by a furnace originally. There are radiators throughout.

b. Lighting: According to an early description of the house, it was originally fitted with gas lighting.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south onto Gallatin Street. It sits on two lots, on a knoll which elevates it above the street, where there is a retaining wall and a set of steps into the front yard. The house is situated towards the front of the yard, with a larger backyard.

2. Historic landscape design: The McEwen House is part of a late-19th century suburban subdivision, within walking distance from the B&O railroad line. Early on, the yard included a large chicken house, and probably a kitchen garden.

3. Outbuildings: There are no outbuildings on the property today. However, an 1890 account mentions a large chicken house and pump house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original architectural drawings: Because this was a pattern book house, the original plans exist in a book produced by the author/architect, R.W. Shoppell (and the Cooperative Building Plan Association), *Modern Houses*. This house is designated "Residence Design No. 444."

B. Bibliography:

Gowans, Alan. The Comfortable House; North American Suburban Architecture 1890-1930. Cambridge Ma.: MIT Press, 1987.

Pearl, Susan G. (P.G. Co. Historic Preservation Commission), Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form, McEwen House, prepared September 1987.

_____. (Research historian for the Historic Preservation Commission). Victorian Pattern Book Houses in Prince George's County, Maryland. Published by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Spring 1988.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the McEwen House was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert J. Kapsch, chief; and the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to document select sites throughout the county. Phase I of the project began in January of 1989, and the second phase of which this project was a part, began in March of 1990. Gail Rothrock, director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian of the HPC made the selection of sites. They also provided access to their research and information on file with the HPC as well as their extensive knowledge of county history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie prepared this historical report and accompanied the photographer into the field for on site inspection.